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DISBARRED LAWYER ARRESTED ON BANKRUPTCY FRAUD CHARGES

Greenbelt, Maryland - United States Attorney Thomas M. DiBiagio announced today that Bridgette M. Harris, age 44, of Silver Spring, Maryland, a former bankruptcy lawyer, was arrested this morning after being charged with ten felony counts relating to bankruptcy fraud, concealing and fraudulently transferring assets of a bankruptcy estate, and making false declarations in bankruptcy filings. The charges were set forth in an indictment returned on January 29, 2003 by a federal grand jury in Greenbelt.

The indictment alleges that Harris practiced bankruptcy law in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. In June 1999, the bankruptcy court in Alexandria, Virginia barred her from practice before that court, and the bankruptcy court in Greenbelt suspended her right to practice before that court. The Maryland suspension order cited "a course of continuing conduct by [Harris] of misfeasance and nonfeasance observed by Judges of this court" which "appeared to put her clients' affairs in jeopardy." The Maryland federal district court and other courts in the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania and Virginia also entered orders which suspended Harris from the practice

of law and required her to disgorge fees paid by certain former clients.

The indictment further alleges that during 2000 Harris devised a scheme to defraud the Maryland bankruptcy court and clients when, despite her suspensions, she continued to solicit clients, request and receive fees, and file cases in the Maryland bankruptcy court. Harris is alleged to have filed bankruptcy petitions which omitted the client's true address and substituted her address in order to improperly bring the cases in the Greenbelt court, and that she concealed her role in the cases by causing clients to file the petitions pro se or by filing the petitions in the name of another attorney, without the permission and knowledge of such attorney.

The indictment also alleges a separate scheme in which Harris, who was subject to a substantial judgment for legal malpractice held by Maryland creditors, filed her own personal bankruptcy petition in the bankruptcy court in Brooklyn, New York. During that proceeding, Harris allegedly made numerous false statements under oath, including false representations about her social security number, address, income, personal property, and debts. During the proceedings, Harris allegedly presented altered documents, and made telephone calls to the Chapter 7 trustee falsely identifying herself as a representative of the NAACP, a judge, and judicial law clerk. After the case was transferred to the bankruptcy court in Maryland, Harris is alleged to have fraudulently transferred two parcels of real estate belonging to the bankruptcy estate by executing quitclaim deeds which transferred the properties to relatives.

Harris appeared before United States Magistrate Judge William Connelly and was repleased on her own recognizance, subject to the supervision of Pretrial Services and compliance with specified release conditions.

The maximum penalty for each of the ten charges in the indictment is five years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, three years of supervised release, and a \$100 special assessment fee. The sentencing court can also order the defendant to pay restitution.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Attorney's Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Stuart A. Berman.